

Family Readiness in the ARFORGEN Cycle

By Captain Kyle P. Moore and Mrs. Erica G. Koelder

Since the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) cycle of *Reset-Train/Ready-Available* was established in 2005, units and installations throughout the Army have been viewing all aspects of readiness, training, and Army life through this new lens. The executive officer of 1st Engineer Battalion, Fort Riley, Kansas, framed the sustainment and logistics plans, and the battalion operations and training officer framed the training plan for the battalion around ARFORGEN. The 1st Infantry Division chief of staff directed the assistant chief of staff for resource management to come up with new graphics and charts to show how units spend operational funds based on this cycle, rather than on a fiscal year. However, family readiness is still not framed in terms of ARFORGEN.

Family readiness is a task outlined to all commanders in Army Regulation 600-20, *Army Command Policy*. Units give it a high priority, but there is no standing operating procedure or guideline stating what the unit's family readiness goals should be within the ARFORGEN cycle. This article contains a comprehensive guide on specific tasks and goals for family readiness during each phase of the ARFORGEN cycle. The significance of this guide to the Engineer Regiment is that companies and battalions often deploy separately from the battalion or brigade to which

they are assigned in the garrison environment. A company that deploys separately from its battalion will not necessarily have the support of a battalion staff when conducting the military decisionmaking process. This can leave family readiness tasks within the ARFORGEN cycle up to individual leaders. The solution is to establish an ARFORGEN plan that includes family readiness.

Reset

The reset part of the cycle gives leaders the chance to reconstitute the family readiness group (FRG) and make it what they would like it to become. Everyone who has been in the Army has an FRG experience—either positive, neutral, or negative. The reset phase is the time when commanders can make the FRG experience positive for spouses and families of single Soldiers. Commanders can set the FRG's parameters: Who will be the leader? When and where will meetings occur? Is participation mandatory or voluntary?

Another key component of the reset phase is the creation or continuation of a battalion-level FRG steering committee. This should be a monthly meeting led by the commander. It should be attended by the battalion commander, command sergeant major, plans and operations officer,

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senior FRG advisors (often the spouses of the commander and command sergeant major), family readiness support assistant (FRSA), rear detachment commander and first sergeant, and all the FRG leaders. By making this meeting a habit early and often, everyone will see what will occur in the months to come. The team building done in this phase will assist the group in problem solving while the unit is deployed. By setting the standard during this phase, the unit will be able to establish a normal battle rhythm that all FRG members can anticipate. The Army family thrives on schedules and knowledge of events.

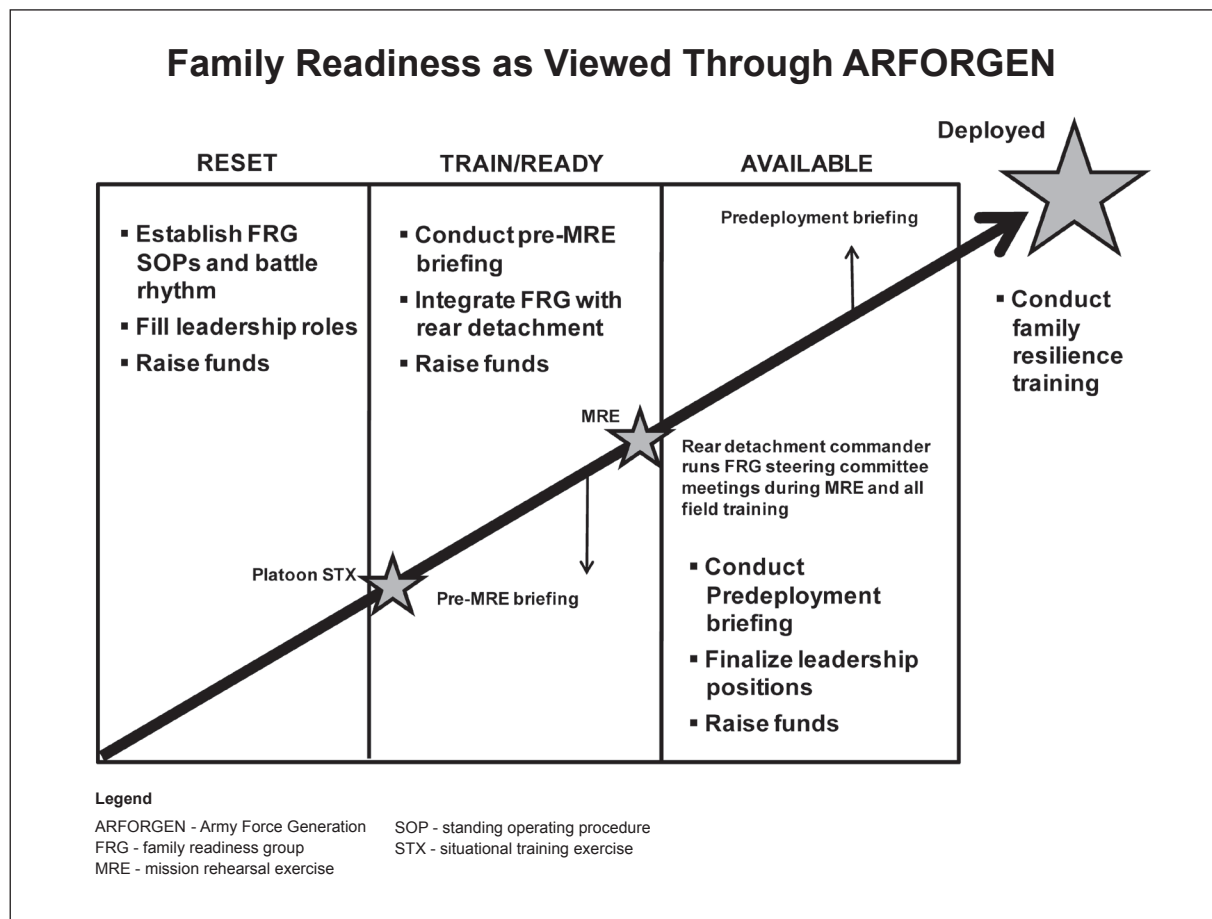
Train/Ready

This is the stage where it will become apparent to an astute leadership group that it is too late to start forming a positive, well-functioning FRG. During this time, the unit is preparing to conduct a mission rehearsal exercise (MRE), often at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, or the Joint Readiness Training Center, Fort Polk, Louisiana. This is a great opportunity to hold a pre-MRE briefing for the unit Soldiers and families. The rear detachment leaders will get their first taste of how their team will form in the absence of the main body. By taking advantage of the main body's absence and working through an MRE briefing, both the rear detachment element and the Soldiers and families will be

able to prepare for the upcoming deployment. In addition, it is the first opportunity for the families to build a trusting relationship with the rear detachment. There are some Armywide factors that go into a successful MRE briefing. These include, but are not limited to—

- A briefing led by the senior commander deploying to the MRE.
- Rear detachment leader attendance to give the families a proper introduction.
- Army Community Service presence to show families the resources available.
- FRG leader involvement to show the families who will be their first line of information from downrange.
- After action review feedback from the FRG steering committee members.

This pre-MRE briefing can also be used as a dress rehearsal for the predeployment briefing given during the available stage. It is up to the leaders to give families as much of an opportunity as possible to ask questions and get involved in the upcoming deployment. This empowers the families to make smart decisions leading up to the Soldiers' departure and to continue to make smart decisions on behalf of the Soldiers while they are gone.



Available

This is the calm before the storm. The center of gravity for family readiness in this phase is a pre-deployment briefing, which should be a reflection of the pre-MRE briefing, made better by the after action report comments received a few months earlier. Keeping the same “shape” to the meeting allows the families to become familiar with the process. On top of the components from the MRE briefing, a deployment book or packet should be distributed to all Soldiers, single and married. The deployment packet should include items such as—

- A checklist of important documents.
- A list of all applicable powers of attorney.
- Red Cross information.
- FRG and rear detachment contact information.
- Other information required by the command group.

Commanders and FRG leaders should be stationed at tables so that families can update family information forms and interact with each other. Another station should be set up for single Soldiers to remit their packets to a selected staff member. This packet should be mailed to the Soldier's next of kin (as established on the family information form, DD Form 93, *Record of Emergency Data*, and Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance forms.) Depending on the size of the unit and the number of missions it will be serving, the event may need to be conducted over several days. Again, an after action report should be conducted with the FRG steering committee members to identify any unresolved issues brought up by the families at the event. The rear detachment and the FRG steering committee should take the lead on addressing the issues to give further confidence in the program's legitimacy and competency in the eyes of the families.

Not paying proper attention to the FRG during this phase has potentially dangerous consequences. Families preparing to stay behind may feel isolated if they aren't encouraged to interact with others. This feeling of isolation could lead to trouble if families don't know where to turn if problems arise and don't use all the installation's available resources and activities. Families experience many stressors at this time, and leaders should work to identify potential problems.

An unfortunate reality is that many Army units only begin to set up their FRGs during this phase of the ARFORGEN cycle. The unit training calendar and operations tempo make it difficult to assign a high priority to family readiness. Commanders are juggling packing and shipping equipment, maximizing time off by granting leave and passes, and closing the training gaps identified in after action reports following the MRE. In addition, many families may feel overwhelmed and less willing to volunteer than in other phases of the ARFORGEN cycle.

Mission at Home

Once the unit is deployed, the job of the FRG and rear detachment element is just beginning. During this time, the FRG will also go through multiple cycles of departure, adoption of new routines, rest and rehabilitation leave, then welcome home. Rear detachment leaders will be responsible for all of the FRGs while the unit is gone. It is their responsibility to ensure that the families are cared for, which is no simple task during this stressful time. Planning monthly battalion- or brigade-level events; presenting a strong, visible presence by the rear detachment commander; and coordinating available resources are critical to the success of the FRGs at this time.

Another key component is preparation for redeployment. A spouse resilience training event should be scheduled approximately 30 days before a redeployment. Successful resilience training will take many things into consideration: the mission of the deployed unit; composition of the families; the physical and mental effects of the deployment on both Soldier and spouse; and general “housekeeping” information. This is a great opportunity to give the families official redeployment information about topics such as passes and block leave. Rear detachment cadre members should work with all available agencies to tailor the event to the units' specific needs.

By keeping families involved in the ARFORGEN cycle, units will help the Army fulfill its promise to take care of its Soldiers and their families. When simple steps like the ones described in this article are taken by leaders at all levels of the chain of command, units are set up for successful deployments downrange and redeployments at home.



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